

JIES reviews

Culture

Marcello de Martino, *Le divine gemelle celesti: sacertà del fuoco centrale e semantica dell' aurora nella religion indoeuropea*. 2017. Pp. xxvi, 819. Lugano: Agorà.

This book — very substantial and very erudite (more than 1800 references) — belongs firmly in the field of Indo-European cultural comparison. Like some other students in the field, its writer is very aware of following in the footsteps of Dumézil and, broadly speaking, seems to accept the trifunctional schema; but he is interested primarily in filling out other aspects of the proto-ideology. Developing his earlier book on Fortuna (De Martino 2015, cf. Allen 2018), he here focuses on the mythologeme of sacred fire, starting off with Rome's Vesta (the sacred twins in the title are female).

The first chapter is historiographic. As previously, De Martino contrasts the primitivism and Romanocentrism of Angelo Brelich with the Indo-European comparativism of Dumézil, but here he argues that neither of them drew sufficiently on the work of Otto Huth (1943). The picture around 1950 is complicated by the interventions of other scholars, notably Mircea Eliade, who raised the idea of enlarging the triadic ideological schema to a pentadic one, expressible in the theonymic series Janus-(Jupiter-Mars-Quirinus)-Vesta. However, Dumézil never followed up this 1-3-1 pattern — which (*contra* p.37) need not be thought of as contrasting a socio-structural triad with a spatio-temporal pair (cf. Allen in press). Building on Huth, De Martino sees Dumézil as having overemphasized Vesta's link with endings at the expense of her links with beginnings and, hence, with temporal cycles. Additional aspects of the goddess are centrality, sacred protection, and virginity/purity — but at the same time (compare the Virgin Mother of Jesus), she is linked with maternal productivity (as of the earth).

If the start and finish of a cycle are shown by the circumference of a circle, they cannot coincide geometrically with the center, but theologically the two can be identified: one can envisage the center expanding or the circumference contracting. Vesta's circularity is manifested in her fire, in her sanctuary (her round *aedes* contrasts with the rectangular *templum* of other deities), in her central position in two-dimensional geographical space, and in three-dimensional cosmic space. She herself lacks an anthropomorphic statue since she is assimilated to the terrestrial globe or ball (Ovid's *pila*), as well as to fire. Her central hearth is compared with the central fire in the pyrocentric cosmology proposed by the Pythagorean philosopher Philolaus (contemporary with Socrates). But Vesta's circular quality is also acted out in the grinding by the Vestals of the *mola salsa* sprinkled on sacrificial victims, and in the annual festival cycle. The sun has in fact a number of mothers: Angerona at the winter solstice, Fors Fortuna at the summer solstice, Vesta at the start and finish of the Vestalia (7 and 15 June), and in the middle of that period Mater Matuta, goddess of Dawn (*aurora*). Though all four goddesses are sometimes referred to here as sisters, it is Vesta and Aurora that were most closely linked ('twinning').

After criticising the Belgian Celticist Lambrechts, De Martino discusses the vocabulary deriving from IE **pen* and, in particular, compares the *penus Vestae* with the *omphalos Delphōn*, as well as Vesta's cult with Hestia's. Though Apollo finally came to possess the Delphic oracle, it originally belonged to Gaia, the earth, and the cardinal points that structure terrestrial geography can be interpreted vertically in the light of the sun's apparent diurnal motion (south is to noon and zenith as north is to night and nadir).

Philolaus, an influence on Plato, was totally ignored by Dumézil, but stands at the heart of De Martino's argument. Though his views survive only in fragments, it is clear that the center of his cosmos is occupied by a fire, around which the earth revolves. Though apparently revolutionary at the time, and long ignored in favor of geocentric models, his pyrocentrism is here boldly presented as building on an ancient Indo-European conception. The argument draws on many sorts of evidence (including IE shamanism), before turning to Vedic

Agni and his triple birth. It is proposed (p. 204) that the original Vedic deity corresponding to Vesta and Hestia was Vivasvat who, taken together with fire regarded as an element, explains the masculine gender of Agni. The purity of fire, and of the sacrifices it makes possible, receives due emphasis, but is not connected with the argument proposed by pentadic theory, according to which the set of elements correlate with the basic categories of the IE ideology; nor is the possibility considered that the proto-ideology might have recognised more than one cosmological model.

Starting with substantial discussion of Mātariśvan, Prometheus, and firedrills, Chapter 5 (with its 36-word title and 215 pages) is far the longest in the book. Its focus is on the purity of the hearth deities whose names relate to $*h_1vest(y)eh_2$ ‘Burning’ — Vesta, Hestia and Vivasvat. It leaves to Chapter 6 those relating to $*h_2ewsōs$ ‘the Brilliant’ — Uṣas and Aurora, with whom Mater Matuta can be associated. The contrast is roughly between heat and light — cf. Dumézil’s heading *La Chauffante et l’Éclairante* (1978: 123). Evaluation of the etymological arguments must be left to qualified philologists, but plenty of cultural material is also mobilised. For instance, since Vivasvat, ancestor of humanity, is the last-born of the Vedic Āditi, the birth story of the Ādityās is discussed (albeit without reference to Dumézil’s analysis in his 1977 *Dieux souverains*). A degree of order is furnished by a list (282-3) of four aspects of the sacredness of the Burner:

- The architectonic-structural aspect, associated with the circle-rectangle opposition, is more or less pan-IE;
- * the protective-sustaining aspect, relating to domesticity, cooking, and heating, is prominent in the northern Balto-Slavic area;
- the sacral-unifying aspect, whether physical or metaphysical, is particularly clear in India;
- and the foundational-communal aspect is best seen in Rome and especially Greece — cf. the *prytaneion*, the symbolic centre of a polis, with its ‘eternal’ flame.

Since the proto-IE speakers may well have started as nomads, account is taken of nomads further east, for instance of the Mongolians with their circular yurts. Ritual receives plenty

of attention. A striking picture (348) shows two groups of Russian countrymen using a rope to operate a six-foot-high firedrill (reminding this reviewer at least of the Indian gods and demons who churn the primal ocean). We read also of the rituals performed at the foundation of Rome (especially in Plutarch's account) and of those performed by the Vestals (especially those involving the use of salt and running water). A footnote (502), elaborating on Dumézil's interpretation of the Matralia, suggests its possible relevance to the Buddha's double motherhood (Māyā is replaced by her sister Mahāprajāpatī). As for the three fires of the Vedic sacrificial ground, de Martino leaves aside Dumézil's trifunctional interpretation, treating the semi-circular *dakṣiṇāgni* as purely defensive, so not really sacred; thus he focuses on the round and square fires in the west and east, operating (as often) in binary mode. Avestan and Hittite data are judged to contribute little to his argument. Although the Burner tends to be static, sometimes sacred fire is mobile; Hestia can be linked with the messenger Hermes.

Exploring the analogy 'dawn is to day as spring is to year', de Martino follows Grimm in postulating an **Ōstarā* lying behind the history of Easter but, building on Campanile, he spends longer on Irish Brigid. In the cult of the Christian saint (c. 451-523) at Kildare there survived much IE fire cult (in both its 'twin' aspects). The permanent sacred flame at the monastery, apparently in a round hearth, was first extinguished deliberately in 1220 (550, 570). Irish parallels are proposed for the Vestals and the Pontifex maximus (whose title is linked to Agni *pathikṛt*).

The chapter on virginity and purity focuses on the relationship between fire and water in Roman weddings in general and in the recruitment of Vestals by the Pontifex. But despite their purity, Vesta and Hestia are also mothers, so this leads on to discussion of the Fascinus (phallus) venerated in the Vestals' *aedes*. The domestic fiery births of founder figures (Romulus, Servius Tullius, and Caeculus of Praeneste) are related to the fiery *liṅga* of Rudra, who is taken as an epiphany of the IE Thunder God and his etherial fire. Agni's son Kārttikeya raises the topic of the seven Kṛttikās (the Pleiades) after whom the son is named, and hence of the six or seven Vestals and the original seven Brigidine sisters. A critique of

Dumézil's *Fordicidia-aṣṭāpadī* comparison introduces a discussion of sacrificial offerings, including incense (*suffimen* — on which again Dumézil's views are doubted). Third-century Christian writers claim that the Vestals nourished a serpent, but this idea is argued to represent confusion with a different but comparable cult relating to spring.

The ninth and final chapter, more provisional than what precedes, is about loss of purity. In 241 BC Vesta's *aedes* caught fire one night, and the Pontifex maximus, L. Caecilius Metellus, entered the *penus* to rescue the Palladium and other *sacra*; as an (implicitly) impure man seizing the (pure) sacred image, he emerges blinded. Comparable stories are assembled in which seizure of the Palladium or Pallas leads to blindness; the Athena-Pallas relationship may parallel that of Romulus to Remus (752). Another goddess, Electra, one of the seven Pleiades, suffered rape by Zeus and was connected with the Palladium. Of this cluster of stars only six are readily distinguished by the naked eye, and myths tell how one of them (Electra or Merope) lost her purity and luminosity. Comparable stories come from Kildare and, partly because *electrum* means 'amber', we read of the fall of Phaethon (son of the Sun), bewept by his sisters with their amber tears; if there was an original amber proto-Palladium, might it have been like Siberian idols (*ongon*)? Merope, wife of Sisyphus, seems cognate with Arundhati, who left the other Kṛttikās to join her mortal husband Vasiṣṭha (792). De Martino supports Niebuhr's view that Rhea Silvia was originally *rea* 'guilty' — a Vestal who lost her chastity (albeit in a *hieros gamos*). The conclusion emphasizes the outstanding religious conservatism of the Italic branch of the IE speakers.

It is to be feared that the length, complexity, and language of this work will deter some potential students; furthermore, the book lacks a list of its 40 illustrations and, above all, lacks proper indexes. There is indeed an index of authors (some ancient, mostly modern), but this will scarcely help those wanting to look up, for instance, a particular mythical figure. Moreover, no distinction is made between different publications by a single author — Dumézil simply receives some 200 page numbers. However, students of Indo-European comparativism who buckle down to the book will be rewarded

by encountering scholarship of astonishing vigour, range, and freshness.

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Linguistics

Klaus T. Schmidt, *Nachgelassene Schriften*. Edited by Stefan Zimmer. (Monographien zur indischen Archäologie, Kunst und Philologie, 24.) Bremen, Hempen Verlag, 2018.

This work is an important one for Tocharianists, though for different reasons than one might initially suppose, and its editor, Stefan Zimmer, and publisher, Hempen Verlag, are very much to be commended for the production of an exemplary scholarly work in a most attractive and sturdy format. The book is actually two books in one, the first section is “Ein westtocharisches Ordinationsritual”; the second is “Eine dritte tocharische Sprache: Lolanisch.”

The ordination document is a lightly revised version of Schmidt's 1985 Habilitationsschrift. This document is an important document, the longest in Tocharian B, even in its mutilated form. Heretofore it has been available to scholars as a Xerox, or a Xerox-of-a-Xerox of the Habilitationsschrift. If only for its increased legibility, this new publication would be most welcome. The current version shows the same complete edition as the Habilitationsschrift: physical description of the text, transcribed text, translation, commentary, vocabulary. The editor has added some cross-referencing footnotes to the ordination document and two or three references to work published after 1986, but it is essentially as Schmidt submitted it in 1986.

The second half of the book is by far the more interesting. This part of the overall book is a true nachlass, work left unfinished by Schmidt at his death and given by Schmidt's family to Zimmer to edit and publish. It consists of eight texts written in the Kharoṣṭhī alphabet, Schmidt's transcriptions of those texts, a grammatical sketch based on those texts, and a glossary. Schmidt sees in those texts the heretofore unattested remains of a third Tocharian language. He calls the language "Lolanisch" (after Loulan, the Chinese name for Kroraina); I will refer to it by its more conventional name, "Tocharian C."

The first draft of this review was devoted mostly to examining the grammar sketch given by Schmidt. I said, I think, some cogent, and even clever, things about how it is different at times, and the same at times, as the grammar of Tocharian B (as Schmidt is quick to point out Tocharian C is considerably closer to Tocharian B than it is to Tocharian A). To mention a couple of differences, Proto-Tocharian **ts* (preserved as such in Tocharian B, and Tocharian A) becomes *ss* in Tocharian C, and B and C have taken different paths in merging the declensions of the *-on* type and the *-ont* type. There are times when "Tocharian C" shows developments neither like those of Tocharian B nor internally consistent within C (e.g., the presence or absence of *ā*-umlaut), but such situations are themselves to be expected in a language where data is slight and we can't follow possible analogical rearrangings (cf. Mycenaean Greek where the feminine counterparts to masculine agent nouns in *-ew-*, as in Homeric and Classical

Greek *basiléus* ‘king,’ might be expected to be ***ewija-* in a language which preserves intervocalic *-w-* but turns out to be *-eja-* with no *-w-* instead.

However, at this point “the plot thickens.” A group of experienced Tocharianists and an Iranianist, an expert in reading the Kharoṣṭhī script, led by Pinault of Paris and Peyrot of Leiden had a meeting in Leiden in the middle of September, 2019, examined the underlying Kharoṣṭhī texts (given as pictures by Zimmer) with Schmidt’s transcriptions and came away with the startling (and saddening) conclusion that “no word was transcribed correctly” (Peyrot, p.c.). Just what language(s) the Kharoṣṭhī texts are written in is not immediately apparent, but the “Tocharian C” texts, grammar, and glossary of the Nachlass constitute a chimaera. Schmidt’s “Tocharian C” has, at one stroke, been removed from the realm of real languages to a linguistic parallel universe.

So, what *do* we have in Schmidt’s Nachlass? I can think of three possibilities. First, Schmidt may have subconsciously read into his texts what he wanted to be there. There have certainly been such things happening (the well-known first “transcription” of the notorious Voynich Manuscript by William Romaine Newbold is such a case). Secondly, and less generously, it may have been an outright fabrication, an attempt at deception. But, if so, to what purpose? Thirdly, and more generously, it might have been a kind of “Tocharian Sindarin” — a created language such as Tolkien played so artistically with and given a certain artistic verisimilitude by the reference to old manuscripts where it might be found. If so, it was not meant to deceive, but his family, not having been told of its true nature, passed it on to Zimmer as real. And Zimmer and I (in the first draft of this review), not being readers of the Kharoṣṭhī script, took Schmidt’s transcriptions at face value. Whatever its origin, it was internally consistent and presented a picture of a language which would meet the expectations of Tocharianists, with just enough quirky, unexpected stuff, to again meet the expectations for the discovery of a new but related language.

It is to be hoped that the “Leiden Group,” or some member thereof, will quickly write up a report of their findings so as to make these texts readily available to the wider audience of

interested Tocharianists and Iranianists. So, it is true that, in Zimmer's words, Schmidt's "Tocharian C" is a "linguistic sensation." It turns out, though, that it is a different kind of linguistic sensation than we first thought.

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